

The Campaign to End Statelessness

April 2018 Update



#IBelong

Join us in our Campaign to End Statelessness



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Mobilizing governments and civil society

On 28 February, the League of Arab States (LAS) convened a Ministerial meeting in Tunis on “Belonging and Legal Identity” under the patronage of the President of Tunisia. The meeting resulted in the adoption of the **Declaration on Belonging and Legal Identity** ([Arabic](#)), which builds on positive developments in [2016](#) and [2017](#). The Declaration calls for equal nationality rights for women and for all children to be able to enjoy their right to a legal identity. On the same occasion, LAS launched a new “I am Here” Campaign aimed at documenting positive developments related to the implementation of the Declaration.

In commemoration of International Women’s Day, an updated [Background Note on Gender Equality, Nationality Laws and Statelessness 2018](#) was published on 8 March by UNHCR. Progress in the last year included **law reform in Sierra Leone**, where women can now confer nationality to their children on an equal basis as men, as well as **political commitments at the regional level** by the members of the [International Conference on the Great Lakes Region](#) and of the League of Arab States, as mentioned above.

On 19-20 February, a **Consultation Meeting of Latin America and the Caribbean as a Regional Contribution to the Global Compact on Refugees** took place in **Brazil**. The purpose of the meeting was to present a preliminary report on progress during the first three years of implementation of the [Brazil Plan of Action](#). The meeting concluded with the adoption of the document, “[100 points of Brasilia](#)”, which includes nine regional good practices on statelessness. Among these are procedures to determine statelessness and practices for the adoption of regulations to ensure the acquisition of nationality by children who would otherwise be stateless.

On 13-16 March in **South Africa**, a second meeting of experts from Member States of the African Union took place to discuss and review the “AU Draft Protocol on Nationality and Statelessness”. A third meeting of experts is expected to take place later in 2018 to finalize the draft Protocol, in preparation for submission to the AU’s Special Technical Committees on Migration and on Legal and Judicial Affairs. After review by the Technical Committees, the Protocol is expected to move forward for adoption by African Union Member States.



Opening remarks during the League of Arab States Ministerial meeting on “Belonging and Legal Identity”, Tunis, Tunisia ©UNHCR/Els Jellema

On 14 March, a [high-level side event](#), “[Advancing Gender Equality in Nationality Laws](#)”, was held at the **62nd session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW62)** in New York. The event, which was organized by the Global Campaign on Equal Nationality Rights, drew many government delegations as well as civil society leaders and journalists. Co-sponsors included Australia, Madagascar, Morocco, Sierra Leone, the Office of the Permanent Observer for the League of Arab States to the United Nations, UNHCR, UN Women, UNICEF, and the Inter-Parliamentary Union. This impressive group of delegations led a powerful discussion about the benefits of removing gender discrimination from nationality laws, drawing on lessons learned from recent reforms.

On 20 March, the [European Network on Statelessness \(ENS\)](#) launched an innovative new online tool called the [Statelessness Index](#). The tool is currently in a pilot phase and contains comparative data on statelessness for 12 European countries, including population data as well as information concerning adherence to international and regional instruments, statelessness determination procedures, detention, and prevention and reduction of statelessness.

In its [Annual Update](#) on **Machine-Readable Convention Travel Documents (MRCTDs)** for Refugees and Stateless persons, UNHCR reported on progress achieved with respect to issuance of MRCTDs globally. 30 States are reported to issue MRCTDs to stateless persons in conformity with international standards, while 15 States are reported to issue other travel documents to stateless persons. There thus remains significant room for improvement with respect to issuance of MRCTDs to stateless persons worldwide.



Ms. Isata Kabia, Minister of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs of the Republic of Sierra Leone speaking during the High-level side event at CSW62, New York ©UN Women/Ryan Brown

Implementation of the Global Action Plan

On 16 February, **Burkina Faso** officially launched its National Action Plan to end statelessness at a high-level ceremony. The plan is in line with the 2017 [Banjul Plan of Action](#) and aims to eradicate statelessness by 2024.

With respect to **Action 2 (Ensure that no child is born stateless)**, on 10 March, the Congress of **Peru** approved amendments to Article 52 of the Constitution to facilitate access to Peruvian nationality for persons born abroad to Peruvian mothers and/or fathers. The amendment eliminates an age limitation that existed previously: parents no longer need to register a child born abroad with Peruvian authorities before the child is 18 years of age. Final approval is required by the Executive.

On 6 January, amendments to the [Citizenship Law](#) entered into force in **Armenia**. Among other things, the amendments allow for children born to an Armenian national and a foreigner to obtain Armenian citizenship based on the consent of only one parent. Previously, both parents had to provide consent.

In line with **Action 3 (Remove gender discrimination from nationality laws)**, the Council of Ministers in **Sudan** proposed an amendment to the 1994 Sudanese Nationality Act on 25 February. The change would allow Sudanese mothers to confer nationality to children where the father is from South Sudan, as Sudanese fathers can confer nationality to children where the mother is South Sudanese.

Togo has begun a **review of its Nationality Law** to bring it in line with the Constitution, which provides for equality between women and men in their ability to confer their nationality to their children. Today Togo remains one of 25 countries where mothers are unable to confer nationality to their children on an equal basis as fathers, but there are strong indications in favor of reform in the near future.

On 8 February, the **United Kingdom Supreme Court** overruled historic gender discrimination in British citizenship law. British women were previously unable to pass British citizenship by double descent to children born between 1949 and 1983. The landmark [ruling](#) of “Advocate General for Scotland v. Remein” allows for application for registration as a British citizen from persons born abroad to a British mother during the abovementioned period.

With regard to **Action 5 (Prevent statelessness in cases of State succession)** the European Court of Human Rights issued its decision in [Mskhiladze v. Russia](#) on 13 February. The case concerns the detention of a stateless person in a center for temporary confinement of foreign nationals for over one year pending removal proceedings. The removal was not possible due to the applicant’s statelessness. The Court found a violation of Articles 5(1) and 5(4) of the [European Convention on Human Rights](#) regarding the lawfulness of his detention and the lack of possibility to have the legality of his continued detention reviewed by a court.



A woman at risk of statelessness holds her documents during a verification exercise for individuals with unclear legal status in Podgorica, Montenegro ©UNHCR/R. Srdanovic

In line with **Action 6 (Grant protection status to stateless migrants and facilitate their naturalization)**, on 14 February, **Montenegro** adopted a new Law on Foreigners (in **Montenegrin**) that establishes a statelessness determination procedure. Among other things, the Law allows stateless persons to access the labor market and to apply for a passport and a temporary residence permit.

In **January**, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in **Ecuador** adopted a **Resolution** which complements the Human Mobility Law adopted in 2017. The Resolution establishes a statelessness determination procedure to provide for facilitated naturalization of persons found to be stateless, and includes a key provision concerning the access of stateless persons to legal residence, documentation and fundamental rights.

In **February**, the Ministry of Justice and Public Security of **Brazil** enacted an **ordinance** that regulates provisions on statelessness determination procedures and facilitated naturalization for stateless persons in the country.

With regard to **Action 7 (Ensure birth registration for the prevention of statelessness)**, the Government of **Lebanon** adopted new measures simplifying birth registration procedures for Syrians born in Lebanon between 1 January 2011 and 8 February 2018. It is estimated that some 50,000 children may benefit from this initiative.

On 4 March, UNHCR and the **Ministry of Interior of Jordan** initiated a **7-month grace period** to regularize the status of Syrian nationals living in urban areas. By rectifying their status, Syrians will be able to benefit from UNHCR assistance and to record vital life events such as birth and marriage, thus contributing to the prevention of statelessness.

With regard to Action 8 (Issue nationality documentation to those with entitlement to it) the Indonesian Consulate in Davao City, the **Philippines**, issued Indonesian passports to 300 persons verified as Indonesians by descent.

On 18 January, the Law on court fees was amended in **Ukraine**. Amongst other changes, the residents of the temporarily occupied territories are now exempted from court fees in cases related to recognition of births and deaths.

With respect to **Action 9 (Accede to the UN Statelessness Conventions)**, following **previous developments**, the Senate of **Chile** unanimously approved draft bills authorizing the Executive Branch to accede to both the 1954 and 1961 Statelessness Conventions. Chile's accession to both conventions is expected soon.

On **2 March**, the Council of Ministers of **Spain** approved the country's accession to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. The next step is approval by the Parliament.

Media Impact of the Campaign

On **25 February**, West Africa celebrated the **third anniversary of the [Abidjan Declaration on the eradication of statelessness](#)**. University Conferences on statelessness and activities with children took place in **Guinea Bissau**, and an **[informative documentary](#)** on statelessness was broadcast on national television in **Togo**. Artists from **Burkina Faso, Guinea Bissau, Ghana** and **Senegal** lent their voices to produce **[short video messages](#)** in order to raise awareness on the causes and consequences of statelessness, and to mobilize governments and civil society. The activities related to the anniversary received wide **[media coverage](#)**.

In **Côte d'Ivoire**, UNHCR and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs organized a ceremony to announce the winners of a **[Journalism Competition](#)** on statelessness launched in **November 2017**. An award ceremony honoring the **[three winning productions](#)** was held on 25 February to coincide with the third anniversary of the Abidjan Declaration. The Minister of Justice and Human Rights together with UNHCR released a joint **[public statement](#)** on the progress achieved in Côte d'Ivoire towards the eradication of statelessness by 2024.



Children who participated in the painting activities organized to commemorate the 3rd anniversary of the Abidjan Declaration in Bissau, Guinea-Bissau ©UNHCR/Benvido dos Santos

In **Kenya**, two news broadcasts from a major national television channel featured the issue of statelessness. In February, a member of the [Shona stateless community in Kenya](#) was invited for an interview to speak of his plight as a stateless person. Mushawa Ndoro gave a brief history of the Shona community and highlighted the steps that it has taken in its attempts to be recognized as citizens of the country. UNHCR and the Kenyan Human Rights Commission [participated](#) in a separate broadcast to highlight the consequences of statelessness as well as initiatives related to the [#IBelong Campaign](#).

In the **Americas**, UNHCR developed [four new videos](#) with the purpose of explaining the main concepts and regional legal standards related to statelessness. The videos are available to the general public and will be used at regional workshops and meetings that present learning opportunities.

In **Europe**, two media events took place showcasing statelessness and solutions. In the Balkans, on 25 January, a TV network aired a [feature in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia](#) with participation from UNHCR. UNHCR also shared [Jirair's story](#), a piece concerning a formerly stateless person who recently acquired **Georgian** citizenship. After years of frustration, Jirair has finally been recognized as a citizen of the country where he was born.



UNHCR and partners march to say "No" to statelessness in Lome, Togo ©UNHCR/Mensah

Upcoming Events

The 10th edition of the [AFRIKABOK Festival](#) will take place in **Senegal** from March-April, visiting 10 villages along the Senegal River. During the Festival, short films on statelessness will be broadcast and followed by informative sessions on statelessness and nationality issues.

From 7-8 June, a **Regional Conference on statelessness in Central Asia** will take place in **Almaty, Kazakhstan**.

The conference, entitled “Leaving no one behind at birth”, will focus on birth registration for the prevention of statelessness and promote the right to legal identity for all.

[UNHCR’s Annual NGO Consultations](#) will take place from 27 – 29 June in Geneva. The theme of this year’s consultations is ‘Putting People First’ and participants will have the opportunity take part in a thematic session on “**Statelessness and the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF)**”, which is expected to take place on 27 June. NGOs wishing to attend should register using the [online registration form](#) by 25 May 2018.

Campaign Resources

Want to support the Campaign? Take a look at our [#IBelong website](#) and post a digital banner on your website, mobilize your social media contacts by sharing one of our posts, download and post our Twitter cards or embed a short video that explains statelessness. Videos, photo essays and web stories can be found on our [#IBelong stories page](#). Legal resources are available on [Refworld](#).

Learn More About Statelessness

Learning about statelessness is fun and easy. Take advantage of our [self-study module](#) from the comfort of your armchair!



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